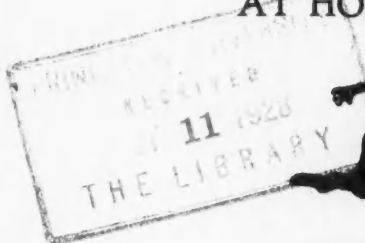


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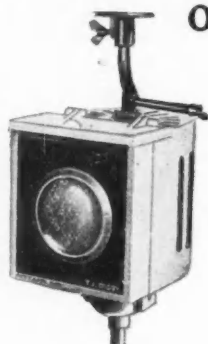
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DRAMA

VOL. VII

OCTOBER MCMXXVIII

NUMBER 1

THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

RECENT PLAYS

By Ivor Brown

THE August holiday no longer exists in the London theatre and the month is as busy as any other for critics and first-nighters. The middle of August was chosen by Sir Nigel Playfair for his Hammersmith revival of "She Stoops to Conquer." He has received a general congratulation on the result. His production was a model of ease and taste, free both from the familiar incrustation of "gags" and traditional tom-foolery and from any fussiness and fantastication. He himself rode the part of Tony with a light hand that kept horse-play subject to comedy of manners. It was splendid to see Miss Marie Ney having a merited opportunity to reveal her accomplishment; her Kate was admirable.

"Her Cardboard Lover," at the other Lyric, allowed Miss Tallulah Bankhead to let off some of those emotional fireworks in which the first-night gallery takes hysterical delight. The piece is a trifle about the constant lover's pursuit of inconstant lady; Mr. Leslie Howard pencilled a light design of comedy on the cardboard, while Miss Bankhead was setting the house on fire. If this piece "goes" it will be by virtue of the players' propulsion. The same is true of "The Moving Finger," a piece of Chinese "crookery" with a conclusion sufficiently sanguinary to have delighted Elizabethan groundlings. Mr. Basil Dean produced it, Mr. Ernest Milton determined to invent a bodiful mandarin who would be different from Mr. Wu, and Mr. George Curzon made a great hit as a Eurasian scoundrel of the first

lustre of decadence. Another contribution to Crooks' Corner was "Knight Errant," at the St. Martin's, by a new dramatist, Mr. E. F. Boyd, who gave a mannerly air to a wild night's narrative and had the admirable quietude of Mr. Hugh Wakefield to make a comic centre to a Kentish vortex.

Since then Mr. Arnold Bennett (at the St. James's) has presented "Faust" in clothes which are not to be called plain since Sir Gerald du Maurier wears them. Having raised the great issue of rejuvenation by way of glands in Cambridge, he turned it loose in a night-club in Park Lane; naturally Sir Gerald's presentation of Sir Henry Fausting, superb in the learned 'eighties and glamorous in the dashing 'forties, will draw the town, but this is not as good a play as it ought to have been. The beginning is Mr. Bennett at his best. Was he bored with his close? At any rate he declined to finish in the important and exciting way in which he had begun. At the Playhouse Miss Gladys Cooper has produced "Excelsior," which is the rake's progress studied with some realism, presented with some cynicism, and concluded with a notable display of tragic irony. In the part of the Montmartre baggage who makes good—or bad, as you conceive it—Miss Cooper is brilliant alike in the early uncouthness and the final, frozen inhumanity of a queen in modern Babylon. The piece is beautifully staged and merely to see the sculptured acting of the modish monarch enthroned in splendour and despair is well worth while.

RECENT PLAYS

"Song of the Sea" is a musical comedy which is deliciously destructive of tradition, since it contains real music (Herr Kunneke), real comedy (Mr. Baskcomb), real singing (Miss Lilian Davies), is presented with a real sense of period (Trafalgar), and has been polished to the

last stage of efficiency by the producer (Mr. Jack Hulbert). Can musical comedy be an entertainment for sane and civilized people? The answer, amazingly, is in the affirmative, so long as you are prepared to judge from the single and satisfactory example.

THE THEATRE IN LONDON AND NEW YORK

A CONTRAST

By Irma Kraft

ONE of the basic differences in theatrical conditions between England and America is that in America people go to the theatre and in England they go to the play.

In America theatre-going is a habit. With the shop-girl as well as the millionaire; with the soda-water clerk as well as the professor.

In England it is rather the privilege of the wealthy and the leisured classes. There may be pit, gallery and balcony queues, yet I doubt whether a single person in these queues has not a definite reason *each time* that he goes to the theatre. I doubt whether it ever becomes a habit. Or whether, in each instance, he is not going to some play which he particularly wishes to see.

In New York we go to the theatre whether the play is good, bad or indifferent. The *habit* is part of our existence. We may be disappointed again and again, yet we keep on going because the theatre plays a very essential part in our lives.

In London people go to a play if they happen to hear that it is good, if it is by a popular author, or if a favourite actor happens to appear in it. There is always a *reason* for going. And the reason has to be as compelling as a game

of cricket at Lord's, a tennis match at Wimbledon, or a boat-race at Henley.

In New York one feels very much "out of it" if he has not seen the latest success. One dares not go to a dinner party nowadays without being able to discuss intelligently—"Strange Interlude," "Coquette," or "Marco Millions." And you cannot bluff it out, you have to discuss it as if you had been there. This may seem exaggerated, but it is, for the most part, true.

In London nobody talks about the theatre except a small circle of people who are in some way identified with it. Dinner parties are far more concerned with the latest sporting event or with the latest divorce or with the success of "the season"!

In New York almost *everybody* is interested in the theatre. In its actors, dramatists, producers, plays, dancers, singers and, of course, in its film artists. Everything about the theatre draws the public at large. They frequent cafés where actors may be seen—and name everything after a popular star from a baby to a shaving cream! Matinée girls and their sympathetic mothers wait, in all sorts of weather, to see some favourite star emerge from her dressing room. A dinner party is assured of success if a

THE THEATRE IN LONDON AND NEW YORK

hostess can just promise that some stage favourite will run in for a moment after the "show."

In London I have found that there are many circles in which the theatre is not discussed at all. It is equivalent to dropping a Soviet bomb to ask, quite casually, what the hostess may think of a current play!

In New York theatres spring up almost over-night. They become more costly and magnificent yearly. The problem is often *how* to fill them. Yet they never stop building, and I wonder what will happen if the present rate continues. Probably they will have to substitute play-writing for pie-eating and "beauty" contests at some of the local small town "fairs."

Productions become increasingly costly. Musical comedies soar to the half-million dollar mark. We shall soon need a whole new set of adjectives for Mr. Ziegfeld's next production of superlative beauty. Managers go to any length for new sensations, and I have no doubt that they will soon find a way of taking the Woolworth Tower apart and putting it together again on the stage. One hundred per cent. more effort is spent on production in New York than on getting *good* plays!

All of which may be better for the theatre in general than it is for drama. Great plays do not need princely surroundings. Great themes may drift out from a garret and be housed in a barn.

Yet though London managers do *not* strain themselves to the breaking point in production, their plays are no better than ours. English acting and producing has reached a high level, yet her dramatists seem to me to be resting "on their oars."

London runs riot in a mass of mystery plays, melodramas, conventional comments on modern married life and endless farces. At rare intervals there is a Galsworthy or a Shaw revival to remind one that England has her dramatists.

Or some producer becomes strangely ambitious and presents Tchekov, Strindberg or Eugene O'Neill! But for the most part one sees innocuous comedies in which adventurous young gentlemen inherit unexpected fortunes or a Scotland Yard detective seems less idiotic than usual. Even Milne submerges his talents in an unbelievable murder tale and the public goes mad over an impossible "Alibi."

In America we also have our coarse "Mary Dugans" our ridiculous "Wooden Kimonos" or "Diamond Lil's." Nevertheless we have O'Neill aiming at the dramatic stars, Paul Green browsing among the godly North Carolina labourers, and Sidney Howard pondering on life from Maine to California.

We have, too, more experimental theatres and repertory companies than in London. We have more productions of Shakespeare, Shaw and Ibsen. We have a larger Little Theatre movement than in England and we have more young playwrights eager to try new forms in the theatre.

O'Neill plunges into subjective analysis; brings the "novel" form back into drama, returns to masks, monologues and asides whenever he may need them. And patient audiences sit for six or seven hours while he experiments with brutal, surging yet veracious emotions. Paul Green ponders the problem of the black man. His spiritual life, his social status, his present and his future. Du Bose and Dorothy Heyward give us a brilliant slice of negro folk life in "Porgy" and Milton Gropper delves into the pathetic story of the immigrant in "We-Americans."

In New York we are intensely interested in *problems*. A girl wants to know the truth about her sex life, so Mr. Belasco daringly produces "Hidden." Conventions interest us mainly *after* they are shattered. An irate censor only censures when public opinion

THE THEATRE IN LONDON AND NEW YORK

forces him to take some drastic action.

We want to be entertained, even as they do in London; but *our* entertainment may take the form of satire as in "Burlesque," or drama as in "The American Tragedy" or "The Dybbuk." Amusement with us may mean absorption. Even our comedies have been known to succeed without many laughs, as in "Ned Mc Cobb's Daughter" that was almost starkly grim!

It is an *intense* people who go to the theatre in the United States. Audiences want to "live dangerously." We are more enthusiastic than the English. National differences are never more demonstrated than in the theatre. In England enthusiasm is a thing to be concealed. In America we are proud of it.

Yet strangely enough you have welcomed many of our successes as we have yours. "The Vortex" flourished in New York as in London, as did "Our Betters," "The Constant Nymph" and "Charlot's Revue." You welcomed our "Mary Dugan," "Broadway," "Spreadeagle" and "The Vagabond King." Successes seem to be interchangeable. Yet "Yellow Sands" falls on deaf ears in New York perhaps because it treats of a phase of life little known in America. Our "Road to Rome" becomes a winding path in London and "Beggars on Horseback" rides to a speedy oblivion.

As to acting, I should say that we have a greater number of good actresses—and that you excel in actors. There is an ever growing percentage of young women training for the stage in New York and proving successful on it. This may be because of the huge salaries that "stars" attain. English actors are extremely popular in New York. So much so that managers have shown a preference for them during the past few years. Theatre-goers worship George Arliss, Cyril Maude, Basil Dean, Basil Rathbone and Noel Coward *ad nauseam*!

One further matter. We welcome Expressionism; often in its wildest form. New plays from France or Germany are given good productions. Earnest managers and actors struggle toward a lucid interpretation. In London these strange importations are relegated to Sunday Night stage societies where they cannot disturb the public peace.

England refuses dramas that are not completely tangible. She refuses to be upset by mysterious new methods of lighting and production. The Moscow Art Theatre and the weird Russians may come and go but they seem to leave little impression on a complacent public. Gordon Craig is welcomed everywhere more than in his native haunts.

The question is which theatre is the healthier? Which shows signs of more determined growth? Undoubtedly new forms spring into being through experimental birth-pains. And England had better look to her laurels if she does not want to be classed as a country whose drama is slowly passing out!

There *must* be struggles and mistakes and failures; in the theatre as in life. And no country which does not count the play as one of the important issues of its existence ever remained of primary importance in the life of the theatre at large.

The result of the play competition recently organized by the Sheffield Society is as follows: Members' class, 1st prize of 5 guineas awarded to "The Pressed Man" by Miss Ruth Dodds. Non-members' class, 1st prize of 10 guineas equally divided between "Caught" by Anthony Armstrong and "The Local Ray" by Peter Somerville. The adjudicator was Mr. H. F. Rubinstein, and the society will produce the winning play this season. "The Pressed Man" will be produced during the Drama League Conference in October in Sheffield.

This society has also arranged a competition for designs for settings and costumes of any or all of the three plays, "School for Scandal," "Cymbeline," "The Blue Bird" (Maeterlinck). Prizes will be offered. Entrance fee 5s. An exhibition will be held of all designs submitted during the visit of the Drama League to Sheffield for their annual conference. Full particulars may be had from the hon. organizing secretary, Miss Radford, 404 Pitsmoor Road, Sheffield.



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PROSPECT AND RETROSPECT

THE tenth season of Stratford plays under the management of Mr. Bridges Adams has just ended, and it is no bad moment to consider the general character and result of the performances given. Opening in the days immediately following the war-time gap, they have been continued without a break during a most difficult period. It is now probable that within two years we shall see the plays produced in a house worthy of their author's genius, and if all goes well, that we may for the first time watch the experiment of an adequately endowed theatre, placed a little above the need for instant profit, in which poetic drama may have time to create a stable tradition. Though, as we know, nothing but the devoted efforts of a few Stratfordians have made it possible, this theatre will no longer belong exclusively to Stratford; the whole world has contributed to its existence. It is, therefore, neither ungracious nor superfluous to examine somewhat critically the elements of success and of failure that have marked the last nine years.

The opening of the new venture in 1919 aroused an extraordinary measure of interest. There was hardly a prominent figure in the dramatic world who did not, during the course of the season, visit it with warm goodwill. The Drama League, then in its infancy, contributed not a little to this interest by focussing it in its first Conference, held during the August of that year in the great room of Shakespeare's school, and marked by many interesting and challenging discussions. Above all, there was the warmest sympathy for the young director whose personal charm, justness and modesty of expression, and true creative fervour, proved themselves delightfully in those earliest plays. When, on the first night, he was faced with a maddening delay due to the break-down of one of his new and practical stage devices, no one will forget the eager personal sympathy extended to him by a crowded audience.

The characteristic of the company was youth. The older Stratfordians may have been conscious of a shade of reserve, but the younger generation found, particularly in the beautiful gaiety of "The Dream," promise of a freshness, a finish, and an individual charm lacking in earlier productions. Only towards the end of the season we heard, with something like dismay, that with the fall of the curtain the company was to disperse. In many talks as we sat round in the Oak Parlour of the "Shakespeare"—a spot where much good and some evil has been hatched in connexion with the plays—one can only remember one opinion—that the break up of the company was a profound error in tactics. No one underrated the difficulties of going on—it would have been necessary to challenge other long-established companies on the road, touring organizations had not recovered after the end of the war, bookings were not easy to achieve, funds may have been almost lacking; and yet—and yet—and yet, looking back, it does seem as if this closing down was the fundamental reason for a certain failure to redeem the high promise of that first season, excellent as many later companies proved to be.

Many of the members of that first group reappeared for two or three years in succession, and at longer intervals afterwards, but there never came into being a "Shakespeare Company." Only each year a group of such players as could afford to take the risk of many weeks' unemployment for the sake of about five months' regular acting, were assembled early in the year, rehearsed hastily and "ad hoc" for a specific group of plays, and then, at the end of a rather late summer season, dispersed again with no certainty of reassembling. It is a tremendous tribute to the excellence of English Shakespearean actors that under these conditions so many excellent performances should nevertheless stand to the company's credit. Among individuals

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Basil Rathbone, James Dale, Joyce Carey, Olive Noble, Dorothy Greene, Florence Saunders, Balliol Holloway, Maurice Colbourne, Stanley Lathbury, John Laurie, Roy Byford, George Skillan, Wilfred Walter, and many other names come to one's mind, but by far the most satisfactory among them have been the players already trained in the continuity of the Bensonian tradition. For years it must be remembered that the Benson Company assembled each September, tried out its strength through the long provincial tour of the autumn, working up to the Stratford Spring Festival as its climax, often following this by London appearances, and in later years returning again to Stratford for the summer season, only to disperse for a short holiday before they met again in September. Auxiliary companies gave early opportunities to young players, and despite many drawbacks a body of actors was created, almost entirely as the result of this continuous tradition and practice, who made Shakespearean acting popular throughout the country. It almost seems that the impetus of this earlier tradition has been present in a gradually diminishing ratio throughout the last nine years at Stratford. It is therefore a keen pleasure to find that the present company is to be kept together, and in a large measure will reappear at Stratford next season, after a prolonged tour.

It is doubtful if recent productions have really suffered by their transference to the Cinema theatre, rather the contrary. A small stage is good for experiments. Perhaps no settings Mr. Bridges Adams has devised have been so charming as his first "Dream," "Winter's Tale," and "Henry IV" in the old theatre. The Inn Parlour in the "The Merry Wives" of an early production also remains a delightful memory, but no worse theatre from the producer's point of view could well have existed than the old Memorial Theatre. The greater part of the stage room was unused, the arrangements for dressing-rooms, lighting, sight lines, and audibility were antiquated and hampering, and on the smaller scale now forced upon

him, Mr. Bridges Adams has triumphantly vindicated his ability to accomplish the utmost with the means at his disposal so far as visual production is concerned. As for the acting, one hesitates to criticize, with a knowledge of the tremendous pressure of circumstances in such a place as Stratford; the varying claims of Governors, local authorities, casual critics, the good citizens, anxious chiefly for their town's prosperity and greatness, and the players sometimes casually concerned only for their personal success in a short "season," and its effect on their career elsewhere. One wonders at times that anything has been achieved. The simultaneous production of six or seven plays, the short rehearsals—"Hamlet" may have had to get itself produced in ten rehearsals—made it necessary to select players rather for their previous experience than for their innate suitability, and under such conditions a young producer has unquestionably at times failed adequately to express his intention and authority in the details of the acting and in the balance of the ensemble. Perhaps the visual appeal of Mr. Bridges Adams's work is greater than its oral appeal, his technique of decoration may be very definitely superior to his technique of acting. Yet, given the means, could anyone have done better? I doubt it.

In two years much more ideal conditions may be at Mr. Bridges Adams's disposal. However the funds of the Memorial Committee are distributed, three things should be possible. First, the company should become a definite and continuous organization with a small but measurable proportion of young players—not on the mischievous and useless footing of paying students, but as paid apprentices earning a living wage year in, year out, bound for a period of years by contract, and constantly understudying and giving special performances, so that from their ranks the tradition of the theatre may be built up and its leading players recruited. Secondly, the method of the great Continental playhouses should be followed in another respect in the periodic engagement, either singly or in complete

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productions, of the greatest living players, English and Continental, to break the narrowness which falls on all companies who see no better acting than their own. Thirdly, a definite effort should be made to attract to Stratford not the mere hordes of wandering motor tourists who at times render the place rather unbearable to-day, but groups of people with a young and living interest in the theatre. Already in a somewhat struggling and unaided manner, there exist long established summer schools which have superseded the often exhausting and exhausted chatter of conferences. Does the rebuilding scheme include anything which might embrace these schools in a larger unity, placing at their disposal hostel, studio, and stage accommodation of an adequate character, establishing short courses in the decorative side of the theatre in scene painting, costume, etc., encouraging the students to remain for weeks in close touch

with the actual solution of practical problems of production, during the period of their work at speech, movement and acting? Such schools might easily attain a level which would attract, not the teacher and the amateur only as at present, but actors from existing repertory companies, amateur producers, and students from schools of acting the world over.

So far as it is possible to judge, there is every hope that a reasonable proportion of the funds available, after the construction of a perfectly adequate and workmanlike building, will be devoted to an endowment for working expenses. Performances will now have behind them the financial support, not only of the United Kingdom, but literally of the civilized world. They must be of such a character that they will rank as epoch making in the history of the world's theatre.

X.

HOW MUCH SHOULD A PLAY-READING COST?

HOW much should a play reading cost? This question will be answered differently by different people, as recent experience has taught me. I give salient points of that experience because they raise issues that are of interest and importance to all amateurs who undertake play readings—and productions—to authors, to sundry people who act as liaison officers between the amateur stage and the professional stage, and to others. I suggest, however, that apart from my experience, secretaries of play-reading groups will perform a useful service if they furnish details of their experiences to the British Drama League. Their answers to the question already asked will be expressions of opinion; their answers to another question, "How much does a play reading cost?" will constitute evidence of practice.

Briefly, a play reading given before an audience of members of a playgoers society brought me a solicitor's letter with a claim for £5 5s. production fee, plus £1 1s.

costs. Such was the speedy outcome of an explanatory letter I sent to the author's agents. When I wrote to the author he informed me that if he had been approached in the first place I should not have received a request for the payment of such a fee. He saw his agents, and eventually £2 12s. 6d., plus £1 11s. 6d. costs, was paid. Another firm of agents sent me an inquiry about another play reading. I wrote direct to the author, who sent on my letter to the agents, who wrote to me again to ask if £2 2s. could be paid, and eventually one guinea was accepted.

In my opinion an important principle is involved—hence my desire to stimulate interest among readers of DRAMA.

We who are enthusiastic about the growth and the quality of the Amateur Movement, should be honest with ourselves and honest in our dealings with others—a platitude that is ignored. I know that there are societies that give play readings and that do not pay either reading or production

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fees. They ought to endeavour to ascertain what their moral and financial obligations are in connexion with play readings, and then they ought to meet them. Then there are societies that attempt to get authors to accept nominal fees. Some succeed; and some fail. Basically, amateurs should be idealistic pioneers, and as such they should not be satisfied to thrive, or even to exist, at the expense of authors. Summarized, the position seems to be:—

A play reading, according to the law, is a production for which a full production fee can legitimately be demanded.

Some agents are prepared to press their claims for the payment of full fees—or they play a game of bluff and ask for more than they expect to get.

Some principals are prepared to accept less than full fees and to recommend their agents who have asked for full fees to accept less.

The Incorporated Society of Authors (I understand) has recommended its members to look upon ordinary play readings given before an audience of fifty members (or fewer) of a playgoers society as "domestic readings," for which fees are not expected.

There is no Case Law on the subject—but agents go to the extent of threatening legal proceedings. They might, of course, take a case to the Courts to establish a principle the application of which might turn out to be highly beneficial to both authors and agents.

I do not write in any spirit of acrimony.

I think, especially in view of the considerable increase in play reading societies and groups during recent years, that the question, "How much should a play reading cost?" ought to be capable of ready and accurate answer by reference to Case Law arising out of judicial interpretation of the Copyright Act. The details that I have given demonstrate the uncertainty of the present position from the point of view of the officials of an amateur society. A letter I received from another author gives a clear indication of another view point. Having been involved in correspondence as the outcome of two play readings, I wrote to the author of a third play before it was read. He replied:—

My difficulty in replying to such a letter as yours is that I am afraid of letting down my fellows by concessions that waive the legal point of view. I am not quite clear about either law or custom in the case you suggest, but if there is no payment, and if your experience is that other authors usually or frequently allow readings without a fee, I am willing—without prejudice!—to follow them.

An interesting—and a guarded—reply !

There are sundry pros and cons and emerging issues that cannot be elaborated. I surmise that the sales of copies of, say, plays published in the British Drama League series of plays prove that amateurs are not extensive readers of plays. Play readings create interest in authors and their plays. They are a means of developing interest in theatrical productions. There are other repercussive effects of play readings that can benefit amateurs, professionals, authors, their intermediaries, producers, managers, etc. The British Drama League has not the money to finance a test case, but there are large playgoers societies with ample revenues from which, I suggest, it would be worth while to get this question definitely settled on a basis of all-round justice, or, at any rate, on a basis that is connected with a legal interpretation reached in the Courts. As a preliminary, Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth might be furnished with information. Such could be used for educative purposes and also in negotiation with interested parties, even if the time is inopportune to create a test case.

HAROLD DOWNS

The Aeschylus Amateur Repertory Company of North London record a remarkably vigorous activity during the first year of their existence. Productions up to date include "The Eternal Spring," "The Dover Road," "A Bill of Divorcement," "The Torch Bearers," "The Enchanted Cottage," "Escape," "Paul I" and "The Great Well." The next production will take place on October 11. The society has the definite object of establishing a repertory theatre in the north-west of London. There are one or two vacancies for actors and actresses (an elderly gentleman would be specially welcomed), and anyone who can gain membership of the company stands a very good chance for a great number of interesting parts, the acting membership being limited to twenty members. Further particulars may be had from Mr. A. Gardner Davies, 5 Craven Road, N.W.10.

The Mid Somerset Players are a society of professionals and amateurs who, once a year during August, are accustomed to give a pastoral performance in Somerset villages. This year "The Merchant of Venice" was produced on August 22 in aid of the High Ham Nursing Association. The company included Mr. Tom Heslewood, Mr. Charles Barrett, Miss Janet Morrison and Miss Betty Power. The production and costumes were by Mr. Cyril Nairne. The players give their time, labour and money that the country audiences may see Shakespeare produced with care and imagination by those who have devoted much of their lives to his study and playing.

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



THE JOURNAL OF

THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

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Chairman of the Council:

H. GRANVILLE-BARKER.

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MSS. for publication in DRAMA will be considered if accompanied by stamps for return if unsuitable. All Enquiries should be addressed to the Hon. Secretary, at the Offices of the League, 8 Adelphi Terrace, London, W.C.2.

Telephone: GERRARD 8011.

Neither the Editor nor the Drama League as a whole accepts any responsibility for the opinions expressed in signed articles printed in this Journal.

IT will be noticed that we make no attempt in this number of *DRAMA* to furnish an adequate obituary of Ellen Terry. It may be that one day a proper biography may be published, and in any case some visible memorial will undoubtedly be made to the greatest English actress of the later nineteenth century. Those of our readers who desire to read a tribute by one who knew her well and who, on other grounds, is completely qualified to write of her, should refer to Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson's admirable essay in the September number of the *London Mercury*. We ourselves print in this number a reproduction of an hitherto unpublished drawing of Ellen Terry, by Miss Pamela Colman Smith. This drawing exhibits Ellen Terry not in one of her more famous parts, but in one which is perhaps the more interesting since it shows the sympathy she had for all kinds of drama, and her readi-

ness to assist and encourage productions by no means on the normal lines of her ordinary theatre work. This production of "The Good Hope" was first seen in 1906. It was revived in America in 1906-7, and afterwards by the Pioneer Players in London.

By now members of the League will have in their hands the programme for the forthcoming Conference of the League to be held this year at Sheffield from Friday, November 2 to Sunday, November 4. We need not emphasize the importance of such a gathering, designed as it is to afford an opportunity for members and affiliated societies outside London to meet and exchange views on the theatre in general and on the activities of the Drama League in particular. The Conference of affiliated societies has in the past proved of the greatest utility, for it enables the Council of the League to consider, and in almost all cases to promote, the wishes of members of the League, who are thus given a direct voice in its management and policy. This year we shall be particularly glad to welcome Colonel Headlam, who will speak on "The Theatre and the Public," a topic which suggests many issues of vital interest at the present time.

The Drama League notes with pleasure such a sign of outside interest in the drama as is shown by the latest number of the bi-monthly "Readers' Bulletin," issued by the Coventry Public Library Committee. The Bulletin opens with a list of theatre books which have recently been added to the Coventry Library. Clearly these books have been chosen with intelligence and care, while among the twelve public lectures announced to be held in the library during the coming winter, we notice two which are definitely connected with the drama. There is also announced a reading of "You Never Can Tell," by the Coventry Dramatic Study Club. Drama, as a "star turn" in the programme of a public library, is something of a novelty. Films and wireless do not seem to be having it all their own way in Coventry.

RECENT BOOKS

Reviewed by Norman Marshall

- "Strange Interlude." By Eugene O'Neill. Cape. 7s. 6d.
"Three Plays." By H. R. Lenormand. Gollancz. 10s. 6d.
"The Silver Tassie." By Sean O'Casey. Macmillan. 7s. 6d.
"Plays." By Lennox Robinson. Macmillan. 10s. 6d.
"Three Comedies." By Halcott Glover. Routledge. 7s. 6d.

IN the development of an actor, a producer or a playwright there usually comes a phase when the manner becomes more important to him than the matter. At the moment most of the more experimental playwrights appear to be going through this phase. They are so absorbed in new manners of expression that they seem to have no interest to spare for the matter which is to be expressed. They often give the impression of being content with whatever theme is nearest to hand. The simpler and more platitudinous, so much the better. It needs less thinking about, and leaves them free to concentrate their attention on the manner of expression. The consequence is that up to now it has been impossible to make up one's mind about the value of expressionism, as this method, which claims to widen the scope of drama and enable it to express the most subtle shades of thought and feeling, has so far merely been used to refurbish the more hackneyed themes of the dramatist's stock-in-trade and deck them out with a spurious air of originality.

"The Silver Tassie" is a case in point. I may be completely unfair to Mr. O'Casey, but I cannot help feeling that this play was originally conceived on conventional, realistic lines, and only translated into expressionism because the author felt dissatisfied with his theme, and hoped to make up for the lack of originality in the matter by the originality of the manner. Yet the play is extremely interesting as an attempt to combine within the same play both realistic and expressionistic scenes. Mr. O'Casey makes the mistake of taking the abstract figures of the expressionistic scenes and pitching them into the realistic scenes without troubling to give them any real character or individuality of their own, with the result that they seem utterly unreal and lifeless. And there are times when the author seems to have been quite uncertain in his own mind whether he was writing realism or expressionism. Still, in spite of the comparative failure of this play to combine the two methods, it does succeed in giving an exciting hint of what might be achieved by somebody who was a master of both styles.

"Strange Interlude" combines realism and expressionism still further, not just within the same play, but actually within the same scene. Roughly, the method of "Strange Interlude" is that each character, in turn, first speaks as he would in an ordinary realistic play, and then, while the action is "held," he utters what he is really thinking in his own mind. Obviously this method enables the dramatist to reveal each char-

acter and every turn of the action in almost complete detail, and in this case the telling of a comparatively ordinary story requires nine full-length acts. It is difficult to make up one's mind about the success of the method from this play alone, as neither the characters nor the theme is sufficiently interesting to warrant the enormous wealth of detail with which they are set forth. Yet I feel that even with a far richer and more subtle theme and far more complex characters the method would still be a rather clumsy labour-saving device, as nearly everything in the expressionistic soliloquies and asides could be implied in the ordinary realistic dialogue. In spite of these objections, it is impossible to deny the sheer brilliance of the writing, and the courage and sincerity with which this gigantic experiment is conceived and carried through. Reading it, the interest is held unfailingly through act after act, and the New York production has proved that in the theatre it has the same power. But I am inclined to think that this is more a tribute to the brilliance of the writing than to the success of the method, and that Mr. O'Neill succeeds in spite of rather than because of the method he has adopted.

M. Lenormand's plays are examples of another kind of modern technique—what Mr. Ashley Dukes in his introduction calls "kaleidoscopic action," the telling of a story in a large number of scenes stripped of all realistic essentials, each scene expressing one definite phase of character. Lenormand's plays are having so much influence on the technique of continental playwrights that an English translation of some of his plays was long overdue. It is unfortunate that the present translation is wretchedly inadequate, and that of the three plays selected only one is really representative of Lenormand at his best.

The volume of Mr. Lennox Robinson's plays contains all his dramatic work, with the exception of "The White-Headed Boy," and includes two plays—"The Big House" and "Give a Dog"—which are published for the first time. "The Big House" is the author at his best, a delicate, beautiful, and deeply moving piece of work. But there is nothing in this book which, on being re-read, does not increase one's admiration for this author—for the vividness and understanding of his character drawing, the shrewd kindliness of his humour, the atmosphere of restrained but none the less deep feeling, the sureness of his craftsmanship and his feeling for the theatre, the originality with which he can handle an apparently hackneyed theme, an originality which owes nothing to more technical trickeries.

Mr. Halcott Glover's comedies seem to me to be a little weighed down by the style. It is not that it is too heavy for comedy, but that there is a certain somewhat self-conscious delicacy and refinement about it which does not altogether fit the at times almost farcical themes of the plays. The result is that the rather too grave style often gives the humour an appearance of facetiousness which it does not altogether deserve.

THE PLAY IN THE SCHOOL

I. PSYCHOLOGICAL VALUES

By Mordaunt Shairp

This is the first of a series of articles which will deal with various aspects of Drama for Junior Players in school and elsewhere. Future contributors will include Dr. F. S. Boas, Mr. John Hampden, and other experts in educational method. Questions relating to the subject are invited, and will be dealt with by the newly-constituted Junior Drama Committee of the British Drama League.

DURING one heavy-eyed November, a good many years ago, a class of about thirty boys was ploughing through Shakespeare's "Anthony and Cleopatra," goaded on by a gentleman since gone to his "appointed place," but who shall be known here as the Green Shade, for the simple reason that he wore a green shade over his eyes to defend them from the gaslight necessary on those afternoons in November. Never having heard of Nesfield and his well-meaning books, the Green Shade decided that the love story of Anthony and Cleopatra was well lost for the sake of the grammatical parsing and analysings and verbal commenting to which the text could be submitted. And so the class ploughed on until one member, thinking that Shakespeare's play was about the dullest ever written and being unable to endure the boredom any longer, wagered his fellows that he would dress and undress completely during the Shakespeare "lesson" without the Green Shade being aware of it. The class took the wager but afterwards, to their undisguised chagrin, saw that he was going to win it. What he promised, he performed, or rather would have performed, had they not, out of sheer disappointment, given him away to the Green Shade.

Thus did drama in unexpected manner come at long last into that Shakespeare "lesson" and it took the form of grim tragedy.

This true story makes a wholesome prelude to a series of articles on "The Play in the School." It will remind many of what they remember as personal experience that at one time the only English

drama read in schools was Shakespeare, and that more important than the text were the notes to the text. It records authentically the reaction that followed, the birth of the "Play-way," the sudden springing from the desk and tearing off of clothes in dramatic frenzy, the solemn handing over of green and other coloured shades to Helen Wills. Its "psychological values" were obviously intellectual stagnation, deceit and treachery. Its possibilities are now almost extinct like the housemaster in "Young Woodley."

What has taken its place? An intelligent reading of Shakespeare, of course, but with him and vastly more popular are Shaw, Galsworthy, Barrie, Drinkwater, and almost every dramatist who has written a one-act play worthy to be included in a "series." But this is not all. For boys to read plays is excellent, but many now think that for boys to act plays is excellent too, and to act them regularly, since the play in the school can be as valuable a piece of team-work as a cricket or football match. A play in a school always assumes an enlightened headmaster. Nevertheless opinions against it may come from parents and members of the staff not taking part in its production. They say that a play unsettles the school for work, makes the actors conceited and conspicuous, and has a tendency to make the successful actors want to go on the stage.

Let us take these points in turn. That the actors in a school play have their heads full of their parts as the day of production comes near is no doubt true, but common sense will choose the cast from such boys as can afford to pause in their studies for a week or two and not from

THE PLAY IN THE SCHOOL

those at a critical point in their work or on the verge of examinations.

As for the rest of the school, I think that they will soon get used to seeing the school hall turned into a theatre, which means that they will outgrow the ignorant self-conscious attitude of their parents towards the theatre in general. Instead of regarding it as a remote village might regard the arrival of a travelling circus, they will think of it as an intelligent means of recreation in which all cultured people should be interested.

Then a word or two on the possible ill-effects on the actors themselves. It is quite possible for a boy to get "swelled head" and to try to act in class-room as well as on the stage. The immediate remedy is obvious and should be drastic, but it is far more important to exclude him ruthlessly from the next play and from all plays, if reform is not permanent. Never for one moment should the idea be allowed to arise that play-acting is for slackers and other unsatisfactory persons. Rather should the idea prevail that the play is for boys of merit and integrity. And here arises one of its many proved values. It often encourages the unsuccessful and has a definitely beneficial effect on their work. It must be admitted that a great deal of our educational work is a complete failure. In a sense it is bound to be so. In every class there are certain boys who work on day after day and make no progress whatever, and often it is neither their fault nor their masters'. But a continual living with one's failures is depressing and it ends in the boy being frightened away from a chance of success. He fails and fails and at last is afraid to believe that he can succeed. To such an one I have seen the play come again and again as a salvation. He may have quite a small part in it, but it gives him self-confidence and self-respect, and that conviction that he must fail is uprooted. The spell is broken and the boy goes back to his work with a completely different outlook. Nor need he act in the play. A school production ought as far as possible to be self-supporting and to give scope for very varied activities. Scenery and properties, for instance, should be made, not hired, and I have seen school "props"

that would have put many a London theatre to shame. Here is a chance for the skilful boy and a hint for the carpentry side of the school. Surely it is better for boys to build the wooden horse for a Troy play than a wooden towel horse for their parents, as I have often seen them do, and which I cannot believe is really needed?

In a short article there is no room for idealism even if it were desirable. But as I have been into Geography Rooms and History Rooms, I will just throw open the door of the Theatre Room, which I should like to see in every school, with its group of boys constructing the Witches' Cavern in "Macbeth," or modelling the Sphinx for "Cæsar and Cleopatra"; with its Library of Dramatic Literature and its steadily accumulating wardrobe of period costumes. We have no time now to go in. Let us keep to what we know, namely, that the play in the school demands all those admirable qualities which every other good piece of team-work calls out. One of my most successful experiences was a play in which every section of the school, from the captain downwards, had a share.

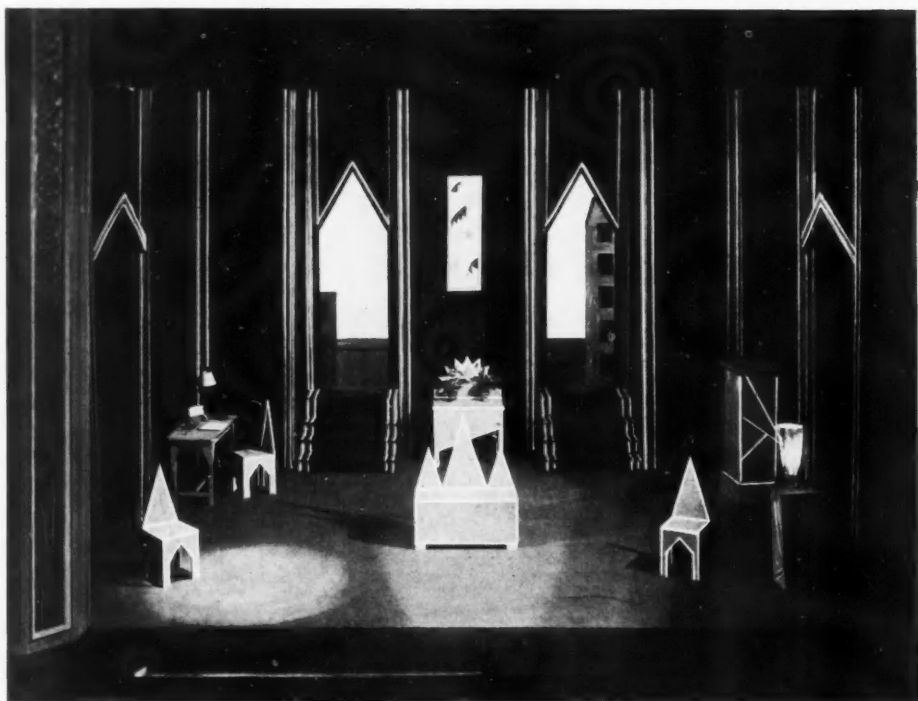
And I have not shirked the question of the boy who becomes a professional actor. Why shouldn't he? If his bent is obviously there, if he realizes that a stage life calls for more character and self-control than any other, let him develop what he has already been grounded in at school.

I only hope that other boys will make as much use of the Scripture Lesson and of Theorem Five.

Exeter Drama League has to report 79 new members in the past year, thus raising our membership to 421. We have produced the following plays: "Dear Brutus" (Sir James Barrie), "The Title" (Arnold Bennett), "The Skin Game" (Galsworthy), "Pygmalion" (Shaw), "Becky Sharp" (Olive Conway), and "Progress" (Ervine). We have given each play twice instead of once, without increasing our charge of 1s. a seat, and acquired some scenery specially designed by our member, Mr. G. E. Pitts. We have had two successful seasons of readings, which we hope to continue in the following year, producing in addition "The Eternal Spring" (Peter Garland), "The Doctor's Dilemma" (Shaw), "The Ship" (Ervine), "The Romantic Young Lady" (Sierra), and "Mary Stuart" (Drinkwater). C. R.



SCENE FROM THE FIRST ACT OF
HANDEL'S "EZIO" RECENTLY PRO-
DUCED AT THE MUNICIPAL OPERA
HOUSE, BERLIN



SCENE FOR THE "DRAWING ROOM" IN R.U.R.
AS PRODUCED BY HERBERT M. PRENTICE
AT THE NORTHAMPTON REPERTORY
THEATRE

The basis or groundwork of the scene was black, with bright yellow lines. Scenery and furniture were carried out in straight lines and angles to interpret the spirit of the play. The colour of the furniture in this scene was lupin blue and silver.

MINUTES OF THE NINTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

Held on Friday, June 29, 1928, at 2.30 p.m., at 8 Adelphi Terrace.

Lord Howard de Walden in the Chair

Minutes:

The Minutes of the last meeting which has been circulated, were taken as read, and signed.

Annual Report:

Mr. Whitworth outlined the principal points in the Annual Report, copies of which had been circulated in the June DRAMA. He drew attention to the record increase of membership during the year, and laid special stress on the success of the National Festival of Community Drama which had been organized for the second time, and he paid a tribute to the Committee which organized this Festival. As regards the scheme for Authors' fees which had been approved by the Conference of Affiliated Societies at Manchester in the autumn, this was still under consideration by the Authors' Society. Mr. Whitworth further emphasized the splendid work which the Carnegie Trust were still doing in helping Repertory movements throughout the country, and he drew the attention of the meeting to the public-spirited action of Mr. Leon M. Lion in following the example of Miss Thorndike last year by taking a Company to Paris to represent Great Britain in the International Festival for 1928.

It was then formally proposed by Mr. Whitworth, seconded by Mr. Lee Mathews, and

RESOLVED: "That the Annual Report should be adopted."

Balance Sheet:

In moving the adoption of the Balance Sheet, Mr. Alec Rea, the Honorary Treasurer, compared the figures in the statement of accounts, copies of which were in the hands of every member present, with the statement of accounts for the previous year. He pointed out that the receipts had increased in almost every department as had also the payments, and he stated that what appeared to be a satisfactory financial position was in great measure due to the generosity of the Carnegie Trust in renewing the grant of £750 for the past year.

It was then formally proposed by Mr. Rea, seconded by Mr. Bernard Shaw, and

RESOLVED: "That the Balance Sheet should be adopted."

Election of Council:

It was reported that in accordance with the rules of the League one-third of the membership of the

Council should retire annually in rotation. The members about to retire this year were:

Mr. Lee Mathews.
Mr. Albert Rutherford.
Mr. W. J. Turner.
Mr. Lewis Casson.
Miss Maude Scott.
Mr. Walter Payne.
Mr. Kenneth Barnes.
Dr. F. S. Boas.

All of whom offered themselves for re-election.

Lord Howard de Walden moved and Miss Edith Neville seconded that these members should be re-elected.

It was further reported that certain members of the Council who had not attended meetings during the past year were due for retirement. They were, however, eligible for re-election by a special resolution of the meeting. It was proposed to re-elect the following:

Mr. W. A. Darlington.
Mr. E. J. Dent.
Colonel Headlam.
Mr. Walter Payne.

Lord Howard de Walden proposed, Mr. Lee Mathews seconded, and it was

RESOLVED: "That these four members should be re-elected."

Election of Auditors:

It was proposed by Mr. Bernard Shaw, seconded by Mr. Glave Saunders, and

RESOLVED: "That Messrs. Searle, Honeybourne & Co. should be re-elected Auditors for the coming year."

Resolution moved by Mr. Ashley Dukes, seconded by Miss Fogerty:

"That the word 'Drama' in the title of the British Drama League shall not be held to include any form of motion photography."

In moving this motion, Mr. Ashley Dukes stated that the question arose at a recent meeting of the Library Committee, when the possible inclusion of books on the film was discussed. The available space for new books was very limited, and taking into account the enormous amount of literature on the films he thought that the League should make a firm stand and confine its activities to the legitimate drama. He did not intend this resolution

MINUTES OF THE NINTH ANNUAL MEETING

to be in any way derogatory to the film world, but he foresaw future developments in the mechanical reproduction of Drama which might make it possible for such a society as the League to receive requests for film records of dramatic performances which would be practically indistinguishable from stage productions. The question of mechanical drama was almost inseparable from that of spontaneous drama. There was no doubt that mechanical drama was a most important activity. And if this question should not be settled now once and for all it would come up again as a hardy annual. It was an important question, and it would be of great service to the Library Committee if some sort of guidance could be given by members as to their opinion on this subject.

Mr. Lee Mathews stated that he had listened with interest to Mr. Ashley Dukes's speech, but he thought that it would be dangerous to pass such a resolution at the moment. He considered it would be wiser to see what developments would take place in the film world, and he therefore opposed the resolution.

Mr. Holford Knight stated that he was in agreement with Mr. Lee Mathews in his opposition to the resolution, but for a different reason. He thought that the antagonism which was growing up between the Stage and the Cinema was most unfortunate. He was surprised to hear that the world of the cinema, which contained more illiterate people than any other movement, should have produced such a volume of literature as would menace the shelves of the Library.

Mrs. Enthoven enquired as to how many books had been written on film work.

Mr. Bernard Shaw replied that the number was colossal. He further stated that he thought Mr. Ashley Dukes was dealing with a considerable difficulty, i.e., the danger that the film business would swamp us if some way were not devised of making the spoken drama come first in our activities and literature. In Mr. Shaw's opinion, however, this resolution was not the way to go about it. It was very much as if Mr. Ashley Dukes were to move in the Mathematical Society that the word "mathematics" should not include any form of trigonometry. The Drama League, Mr. Shaw continued, had certain advantages which it should be very careful not to part with. People sometimes asked him: "What is the Drama League?" He had to admit he did not know, but he was a member of the League and it proved to be a very useful body. People also asked him "What is the *locus standi* of the Drama League?" All he could say in reply was that it went everywhere, and though it had no special business it often contrived to meddle in everyone else's. The great advantage of the League was that it could do anything and go anywhere, and it would be fatal to define its activities. The film business was going to be a very big thing. There would be a great mass of it which would take care of itself. But there might be possibilities in film work which the commercial people would not touch, and the League should keep its hands free to deal with this. Mr. Shaw concluded by saying that he was quite in favour of Mr. Ashley Dukes bringing his resolution up every year, but if the resolution were passed and the news of it appeared in to-morrow's newspapers, people would think how extraordinary the League was. He was glad, however, that Mr. Ashley

Dukes had brought the question forward.

Mr. Glave Saunders suggested that the way out of the impasse should be for the Library Committee to refuse books on the film for the present.

Mr. Dukes stated that to him there appeared a fundamental difference between a dramatic performance and a reproduced dramatic performance, and it was for that reason he had brought forward his motion. He was, however, willing to withdraw it, provided that Miss Fogerty agreed.

Dr. Boas stated that he would very much regret anything in the form of Mr. Glave Saunders's amendment. The Library Committee would be bound by that resolution if it were passed, but so long as the League did not take that view, he thought that the Library Committee should be allowed to exercise its own discretion.

Mr. Shaw enquired whether Mr. Ashley Dukes objected to all forms of mechanical reproduction. For instance, a No. 3 Company touring a West-end success.

With the assent of Miss Fogerty Mr. Ashley Dukes withdrew his motion.

Other Business:

Dr. Boas stated that on behalf of the Library Committee he had been very glad to accept the Plaque commemorating the connexion between Thomas Hardy and 8 Adelphi Terrace. He wished it to be placed on record that the Library Committee had felt greatly honoured by this gift, which had been made by Sir James Barrie and Mrs. Thomas Hardy.

A vote of thanks to Lord Howard de Walden for taking the chair was proposed by Miss Fogerty, and passed unanimously.

The meeting closed after Lord Howard de Walden had thanked those present.

A ONE-ACT PLAY.

Scottish societies entering for the Festival of Community Drama (particularly in view of the desire of the promoters that new plays be presented) are notified that we have in the library a new one-act play entitled "The Raeburn" by Mrs. Fletcher Lee, the author of the play "Robert Burns" which received very favourable criticisms in this and other journals. "The Raeburn" is present-day, and has two excellent parts for women and three minor male parts. Application should be made to the librarian.

A member of the League would be grateful to anyone who could supply the following back numbers of DRAMA: First Series, Vol. 1, Nos. 5 and 7 and subsequent numbers. New Series, Nos. 2, 3, 21, 35 and 41. If anyone is willing to dispose of these numbers, will he kindly communicate with "L. M.," Flat No. 2b, 2 Harrington Gardens, S.W.7.

On October 3 to 6 the Plymouth Amateur Players are producing "The Man from Toronto" at the Globe Theatre, Royal Marine Barracks. Act I of this play is to be broadcast by the local station of the B.B.C., the first occasion, it is believed, on which an amateur play has been broadcast from a theatre.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

THE ALTRINCHAM GARRICK SOCIETY

The Annual Meeting of the Altrincham Garrick Society was held in the Garrick Rooms on Wednesday, June 20, Mr. P. M. Oliver, C.B.E., B.A., presiding.

The Treasurer (Mr. A. P. Hill) read the Treasurer's Report which showed that a profit of over £300 had been made during the season. The Theatre Building Fund shows a total of £1,014.

In presenting the annual report on the work of the Society, the Secretary (Mr. W. Eric Landon) announced that the work was in a flourishing condition. The membership now stands at 789, of which total 137 have been admitted during the season.

The total number of performances during the season, given by or under the auspices of the Society, is sixty-six, and the attendances have been 10,439 for the Garrick productions and 1,472 for performances by visiting companies. Both these figures show a marked increase over the results of the previous season.

The Society entered "The Dear Departed" for the B.D.L. Festival and obtained the highest marks in the North-Western area for the preliminary performances, which were judged by Dr. L. du Garde Peach, but were beaten at the Area final at Liverpool.

The plays presented by the Garrick Repertory Company during the season include:—"Mirandolina" (Lady Gregory), "Doctor Knock" (H. Granville-Barker), "A Bit o' Love" (John Galsworthy), "The School for Scandal" (Sheridan), "Home and Beauty" (W. S. Maugham), "E. and O.E." (Crawshaw Williams), "Cupboard Love" (Crawshaw Williams), "Hyacinth Halvey" (Lady Gregory), "The Love-crowned King" (Philip Kirk Stedman), and others.

The total number of plays presented since the inception of the Society is 146, of which twenty-two were produced for the first time on any stage. The forthcoming season will mark the commencement of increased activity in every department of our work, and all energies are being turned to the building up of our Community Theatre Fund. The site has been purchased and the plans drawn up and no effort is being spared to bring the scheme to a successful issue.

THE LEWISHAM DRAMATIC SOCIETY

This society gave a very varied programme of four one-act plays at King George's Hall, Caroline Street, on Saturday, July 14. Unfortunately I missed the first play which was "Me and My Diary" and arrived just in time to see "Masses and Man," by Ernst Toller. The production was much too slow and dreadfully inaudible. Although I sat in the front row of the stalls, I could not hear a word "The Man" said. "She Woman," played by Daphne Odin Pearse, who showed much versatility during the evening, was good up to a point. It was a pity, however, that she emphasized every possible preposition and so spoilt the sense

and beauty of the lines. "It's the Poor that 'Elps the Poor," which followed "Masses and Man" again was too slow. Avis Brechman as Mrs. Harris showed an excellent sense of character, and Reginald Webb was much better in this play than in "Masses and Man."

"The Dear Departing," a satire by Leonid Andreyev, translated by Julius West, was very amusing, but it dragged, it was played too slowly. I am afraid that Mr. Victor Lewisoohn, who produced the plays, will think that I want everything taken at a great rate! That is not so, but it is fatal for a play to drag. The last one particularly needed good pace.

An excellent programme of music was provided by an orchestra under the direction of Otto Ernst.

Although it was an intensely hot evening, there was a large and appreciative audience.

J. R.

THE TAUNTON PLAYERS

The Taunton Players were a group of amateurs (not formed into a society) in existence from 1923 to the end of 1927. We started to help the funds of the Taunton Choral Society and during the four years raised over £400 for that and for various charities. The last performances we organized were two concerts given by the schools of Taunton for the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-on-Avon.

In the Lyceum Theatre, Taunton, we produced "The Rivals," "The School for Scandal," "What Every Woman Knows," "She Stoops to Conquer" and "Pygmalion." And some of these we also gave at Minehead, Wellington and Chard.

In Taunton and neighbouring towns and villages we gave variety shows in costume, in which we were greatly helped by the Arts League of Service. We rehearsed everything as thoroughly as possible, and never produced anything that did not seem worth spending our time over. We entered each year for the British Drama League Festival, which was a great interest and delight.

It has been very hard work, but a joy, and I hope that everyone who was connected with us will look back on these four years with pleasure.

FINSBURY

Never having seen "The Great Broxopp" before I thoroughly enjoyed the performance given by the Finsbury and City Dramatic Group on Friday, June 15, at the Cripple Gate Theatre.

According to the programme it was given, by request, in aid of the Sadlers Wells Fund. There was a large and appreciative audience. The acting, in most cases, was good. A. A. Milne at all times has a charm of his own which was not overlooked by this group of players, who gave a very bright and spirited performance. The play was produced by Mr. F. A. E. Mumford. During the intervals Miss Deborah E. Elliot played to us.

J. R.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

HISTORICAL PAGEANT AT ALTON TOWERS

This Pageant, organized by the Staffordshire Federation of Women's Institutes, president, Miss Rosamund Harmon, O.B.E., was a remarkable artistic success. This was achieved in face of considerable difficulty as the fifteen hundred performers were gathered from eighty-two villages and had never been on the Pageant ground before.

The costumes, including those worn by the principals, were (except in the case of one woman and about a dozen men) made by the Institutes. They were made of the cheapest materials and dyed to the required shades, thus making possible schemes of colour which could not have been carried out except at much greater cost if ordinary stuffs had been employed. The fact that each dress was made for the particular person wearing it, and had been available for rehearsals some time previously, made the performers feel quite at home and obviated that "dressed up" look so painfully familiar at not a few amateur performances. Over five hundred sketches were issued for the costumes and as far as possible they were made, not from modern books of reference, but from original contemporary documents.

The Producer was Mr. Howell Davies, who assisted and inspired all working under him.

WELWYN

The *Welwyn News* describes a scheme for the creation in the Dell in Sherrard's Wood near Welwyn of an open-air theatre. The natural excellence of the Dell could be improved out of all proportion from an acoustic point of view by a little art. Those who are interested in the erection of an ideal open-air theatre near London might like to communicate with Mr. F. J. Osborn, c/o The British Drama League.

NEWTON ABBOT

The Newton Abbot Repertory has now completed its fifth session, which was opened last September with a presidential address by Dr. L. du Garde Peach. There have been fortnightly play readings for members, an evening devoted to original plays by members, two performances by junior members of the Company for children, and monthly public productions.

The outstanding feature of the past session has, however, been the Company's extension of its activities outside its own town, mainly as a result of the touring equipment acquired by the Carnegie grant, by means of which it is now possible to convert the village halls into temporary theatres. Eight towns and villages have been visited during the winter months, the following plays having been toured: "Everyman"; "The Travelling Man," by Lady Gregory; "King Lear at Hordle," by Bernard Gilbert; "The Changeling," by W. W. Jacobs; "Oak Chests," by L. du Garde Peach; "The Fantasticks," by Edmond Rostand; and "Hard Winter," a Devonshire play in three acts by J. Rae, one of the members of the Company.

The reception that the Newton players have received in the neighbouring villages has been a most encouraging one and has resulted in a great influx of rural members, through whom it is hoped eventually to establish a number of independent village dramatic societies.

BERKHAMSTED

On the evening of July 7 Mr. B. A. Pittar and his company gave a performance of "King Lear" on the terrace of Berkhamsted Grammar School. Mr. Pittar had wisely arranged his production on the simplest possible lines, and had avoided the common error of revealing difficulties by attempting the impracticable. No effort was made to indicate scenic changes, and whatever apprehensions had been felt as to the effect of a tempest suggested in the open air and under the summer sky by the ordinary concealed devices of theatrical mechanism happily proved to be without foundation. The Shakespearean magic transcended all obstacles and seemed to subdue the mimic sounds of thunder, wind and rain to its own ends. The moderate use of the hidden appliances at appropriate cues suggested far more to the imagination than any closer imitation of nature could have done. The course of the scenes, and especially those omitted, was elucidated at intervals by brief notes written for the occasion by Mr. Arthur Machen and read by Miss Bertha Eves.

THE HARLECH PAGEANTS

The three Harlech Pageants produced in 1920, 1922 and 1927 have been a notable success, and Dr. A. P. Graves has kindly sent us the two Pageant Books which form the material for these performances, together with an Episode written by himself, entitled "Margaret of Anjou at Harlech." Dr. Graves's Episode is founded on Welsh records and traditions relating to Queen Margaret's stay in Harlech Castle with Prince Edward. Two scenes and the Episode might be useful to those desiring to perform a historical pageant, as the interest is by no means entirely local. Those desiring to see the MSS. should apply to the Librarian.

THE ISIS PLAYERS

The Isis players, a society consisting mainly of Oxford women, gave sixteen performances of "The Merchant of Venice" last year in L.C.C. schools, for the benefit of those children who are unable to see professional companies. They are now producing "Much Ado About Nothing," opening at the People's Palace (Small Hall) for four nights on October 22, afterwards visiting other districts.

Membership of the Shakespeare Company is not confined to Oxford women, and the producer, Miss Nancy Hewins, 75 Chester Square, S.W.1, would be glad to hear from members of affiliated societies (preferably university women or trained in a dramatic school) who are free after 5.30 at least three days a week. There may be a few vacancies in the second company for "Much Ado," but otherwise newcomers will be tried out as understudies with a view to casting in the next play (possibly "Richard III"). There is an immediate vacancy for a stage manager (woman) with plenty of spare time who, if inexperienced, must be prepared to learn anything from repairing scenery to adjusting the lighting set.

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XI

THE POETRY LEAGUE

POETIC DRAMA COMPETITION

To be held at ST. GEORGE'S HALL, Little Russell Street, on Thursday, November 29th, at 8. p.m., presided over by ASHLEY DUKES.

Adjudicators:

MISS CONSTANCE SMEDLEY (of The Greenleaf Theatre)
HARINDRANATH CHATTOPADHYAYA, the Indian Poet
A Prize of £5 5s. will be offered for the best Poetic Drama submitted.

THE WINNING PLAY

will be read on the night of the Competition by MRS. PENELOPE WHEELER.

RULES

1. All Entries must be submitted on or before November 10th, 1928, and addressed to the Hon. Sec., The Poetry League, as below, marked *Poetic Drama*, and accompanied by a Postal Order, or Stamps, 1s.
2. Time limit for reading ONE HOUR.
3. Entries must be confined to Plays written in Dramatic Verse.

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